

Not Tonight Dear, I Have a Vow of Chastity:
Sexual Abstinence and Marital Vocation in
The Book of Margery Kempe

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In Chapter 48 of her *Book*, Margery Kempe recounts her trial in the Church of All Hallows at Leicester. Although accused of being a “fals strumpet,” a “fals loller,” and a “fals deceyuer of the pepyl,”¹ one of Margery’s greatest transgressions seems to be that she wears white and represents a threat to the institution of marriage: “Than the Meyr seyde to hir, ‘I wil wetyn why thou gost in white clothys, for I trowe thou art comyn hedyr to han a-wey owr wyuys from us & ledyn hem wyth the.’”² Indeed, for someone not familiar with Margery, such a fear seems reasonable. After all, she has just told the Mayor and the Abbot that she has a husband and fourteen children, yet she has to all appearances abandoned them and dressed as a virgin in order to go on pilgrimage alone—clear evidence that she has eschewed a woman’s responsibilities and thus must have something against husbands and marriage. However, as Nona Fienberg argues, Margery’s quick defense—“I neuyr had part of mannys body in this world in actual dede by wey of synne, but of myn husbondys body, whom I am bowndyn to be the law of matrimony, & be whom I have born xiiij childeryn”³—ironically confirms the authority of the established social order.⁴ Thus, far from posing a threat to the town’s husbands specifically and to marriage in general, Margery’s actions and words here and elsewhere do just the opposite. As part of the hearing before the Abbot and the Mayor of Leicester, the men question her concerning the sacrament of the Altar and the Articles of Faith. Margery’s answers meet their approval and illustrate that despite her unorthodox behavior, her understanding of Christian doctrine is anything but unorthodox. In the same way, despite her unconventional approach to her own marriage and husband, her attitudes towards the institution of marriage are entirely in keeping with contemporary Christian doctrine.

At the same time, Margery clearly desires that she herself be released from the bonds of marriage so that she might more perfectly pursue a different vocation as bride of Christ. She expends much en-

ergy trying to convince her husband to release her from her marital debt of sex and even more time, it appears, bewailing her lost virginity and excessive love for her husband John. What she does not seem to see, regardless of Christ's admonitions and words of encouragement to her, is that her own marriage experiences do not create obstacles to her devotion to Christ, as she believes. Instead, as I will argue in this article, not only do her attitudes towards marriage concur with contemporary doctrine, but her actions also actually encourage and reinforce the roles of wife and mother as a legitimate Christian vocation.

The narrative of Margery's life begins with the information that when "this creatur" was twenty years old, or maybe a little older, she was married to a "worschepful burgeys."⁵ Thus, as Nancy Partner points out, Margery's identity and experience are "by her own emphasis peculiarly that of a married woman."⁶ Not only is her individual experience framed by marriage, but the marriage itself exists against a broader backdrop of shifting social and religious views of wedlock. Significantly, Margery lived and dictated her *Book* during an age of seemingly conflicting values: an anti-feminist and anti-matrimonial tradition continued on the one hand while at the same time the Church was in the process of officially recognizing marriage as a sacrament. In the early 12th century, Hildebert of Lavardin, canonist and archbishop of Tours, argued in his sermon "On Mutual Consent" that a marriage based on love was an indissoluble sacrament.⁷ Later in the century, Peter Lombard wrote the "Sententiarum libri quatuor," one of the first works to enumerate the seven sacraments recognized today, a list which includes Holy Matrimony. The work was pronounced orthodox at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215⁸ and recognized by St. Thomas Aquinas later that century.⁹

Since Margery and John wed in 1393, we can easily conclude that Margery entered into her marriage believing it a sacrament. Furthermore, we also have proof in her *Book* that she accepted the Church's teachings about the proper uses of marriage even as she appears to regret her own status as wife. One night, lying in bed with her husband, she hears beautiful music and leaps up saying, "alas, that eyur I dede synne, it is ful mery in Hevn,"¹⁰ which Partner understands as a statement contrasting heaven with the marital bed, in other words, "not here, not 'full merry' in bed with my husband."¹¹ Such a sentiment is arguably borne out by Margery's words later in the chapter when she explains that "the dette of matrimony was so abhominabyll to hir that sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn the wose, the mukke in the chanel than to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for

bedyens.”¹² In her attempts to convince John to enter into a sexually abstinent marriage, she reminds him that they had often “dysplesyd God be her inordynat lofe and the gret delectacyon that thei haddyn eythyr of hem in vsyng of other, & now it wer good that thei schuld be her bothins wylle & consentyng of hem bothyn punschyn & chastysyn hem-sel wyfully be absteynyng fro her lust of her bodyd.”¹³ Apparently, despite her strong words here, they *have* had many a “full merry” time in the past. Her newfound repugnance for sex with her husband, then, results from a desire to do penance for her earlier excessive sexual indulgence and pleasure.

Several things stand out about Margery’s words in this passage, all of which illustrate the orthodoxy of her faith concerning marriage even as she seems to reject her own and, arguably, manifest the vocational qualities of Christian marriage. First, that she and John have had “inordinate love” and “great delection” in the use of each other suggests that theirs is a marriage grounded in love and affection. Second, her feelings of guilt and desire for punishment are evidence that she believes lustful sex—even within lawful marriage—is sinful. Thus, sexual renunciation is a logical remedy. At the same time, however, she accepts the responsibility of her marital debt as her willingness to commune with her husband “for obedyens” shows.¹⁴ Margery’s words therefore reveal a marriage that conforms to the standard teachings of the contemporary Church and society.

Those teachings were heavily reliant on the works of the jurist Gratian. Around 1140, he compiled a textbook of canon law which became the basis for much of the theological and civil discourse on marriage throughout the high and late Middle Ages. A central idea in Gratian’s *Decretum* was that marriage was part of natural law and ordained by God. Marriage was also beneficial because it promoted love between the couple, which could be lawfully expressed through a sexual union. Clearly, the description of Margery’s marriage at the age of twenty as keeping with “kynde,” nature, affirms the notion that marriage was for her a part of natural law, and we have Margery’s testimony to the love and physical affection she and John have shared.¹⁵

At the same time, Margery’s revulsion toward sex coupled with her frequently expressed regret and feelings of guilt over her “inordinate love” for John reflect the duality of the Church’s attitude toward sex and marriage. On the one hand, numerous theologians and canonists recommended avoiding marriage because of its association with sex. Some of the most extreme and oft-quoted writers focused on St. Paul’s remarks that the unmarried state was preferable to the married, which

served as an allowable outlet for sexual need.¹⁶ Despite Jerome's even-handed treatment of male and female sexuality elsewhere, many of his writings manifest a markedly hostile attitude toward women and marriage. *Adversus Jovinianum*, his most strident attack on marriage, also voices his most extreme position, and although it was considered controversial even in his own time, his tract was nonetheless influential.¹⁷ Jerome particularly took issue with the claim that baptized Christians could achieve "equal spiritual merit" regardless of whether they were married, single and chaste, or widowed. In arguing the relative inferiority of marriage, and addressing St. Paul's words that it is not good to touch a woman, Jerome wrote:

Si bonum est mulierum non tangerum, melum est ergo tangere. . . . Si autem malum est, et ignoscitur, ideo conceditur, ne malo quid deterius fiat. Quale autem illud bonum est, quod conditione deterioris conceditur?

[If it is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one. . . . If however it is bad and the evil is pardoned, it is for this reason that the allowance is made, namely to prevent a worse evil. But surely, a thing which is only allowed because there may be something worse has only a slight degree of goodness.]¹⁸

Margery's desire to avoid sexual intercourse even within the sacrament of marriage reflects the heavy influence of such anti-matrimonial sentiment on her religious aspirations. Yet simultaneously her actions as wife and mother accorded with the many theologians who argued the relative good of marriage. For example, in response to Jerome, Augustine wrote his *De Bono Conjugalis*.¹⁹ While Jerome conceded that marriage was merely tolerable in that it at least produced virgins,²⁰ Augustine held that marriage was good beyond its procreative function: "In good, although aged, marriage, although the ardor of youth between male and female has withered away, yet there lives in full vigour the order of love between husband and wife." [*Nunc vero in bono licet annoso conjugio, etsi emarcuit ardor aetatis inter masculum et feminam, viget tamen ordo caritatis inter maritum et uxorem.*]²¹ Likewise in *Adversus Julianum*, he argued that

Omnino enim in genere suo nuptiae bonum sunt; sed ideo bonum quia fidem thori servant, quia prolis suscipiendae causa

sexum utrumque commiscent, quia impietatem separationis exhorrent. Haec sunt bona nuptialia, quibus nuptiae bonum sunt. . . .

[Marriage is by all means good in its own kind, but the reason it is good is that it keeps the faith of the marriage bed; that it unites the two sexes for the purpose of begetting offspring; and that it shrinks from the impiety of separation. These are the marital benefits, through which marriage is good. . . .]²²

Others argued that in some cases marriage was conducive to the Christian lifestyle. The theologian called Ambrosiaster argued that a wife could turn a household into a holy place where she might establish her own religious authority, while a husband would become the benevolent head of the household, attending to the sustenance of his servants.²³

Although written several centuries before Kempe, such teachings continued to be relevant to the debate over marriage and in particular to address its sacramental nature. Neil Cartlidge points out that in the process of sacramentalizing marriage, the Church conferred upon it a "distinctive status, value, and ceremonial, as for a religious order."²⁴ Such a distinction allowed marriage to be considered a "vocation exclusive of any other."²⁵ The vocational aspects of Margery's life are clear throughout the *Book* in the little snippets we learn about her personal life. Although we hear specific details about only one of her fourteen children, in recounting events in her son's life the *Book* makes clear that Margery's interaction with him is of a traditionally maternal nature. He has apparently "fled her company," yet she repeatedly encourages him to leave his irresponsible ways and follow Christ. Her first hope is that he will take religious orders; failing that, she begs him at least to abjure sex outside of lawful marriage. Following his marriage, for which she praises God, he brings his wife and child from Germany to visit in England. Even after his death, she cares for his family and helps them return safely to their homeland.²⁶

Her relationship with her husband similarly illustrates that she pursues a Christian vocation through her marriage. In the same way that her mothering includes physical and spiritual fostering, her care for John is two-fold. First, the few details that we have show a marriage based on warm affection and companionship. We already know that they have had a satisfying sexual relationship but their love goes beyond the physical, recalling the vigor of love between husband and wife described by Jerome. For example, when Margery travels through

out England as God asks her to do, her husband accompanies her because, the *Book* says, "he was euyr a good man & an esy man to hir" and "had compassyon of hir."²⁷ When he eventually agrees to a sexless marriage, part of the bargain they strike is that Margery will repay him by agreeing to eat and drink with him on Fridays as she used to do. Lynn Staley Johnson discusses this scene as one in which Margery identifies herself "as a creature bound to him and, through him, to the greater community."²⁸ Certainly, Margery's involvement in and acceptance of community is significant, but John's words, even in their brevity, suggest to me simply a husband who misses his wife's company. Later, Margery repays his loyalty and kindness in John's old age when he requires nursing. Despite her regret at losing prayer time, Margery gladly takes over the duty—partly because she believes that caring for her husband's body in its sickness and uncleanness is penance for the delight she took in it when they were young.

In addition to taking care of John's physical and emotional needs, Margery also serves as his spiritual mentor as she encourages him to live a Christian life. Through her actions, she fulfills St. Paul's words that "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife" [*sanctificatus est enim vir infidelis per mulierem fidelem*] (1 Cor. 7.14) and recalls earlier English women who drew their husbands to Christian faith. In several instances the early English Church relied on the marital relationship to help in the conversion effort. For example, Gregory the Great wrote to Bertha, a Christian Frankish princess, to encourage her to exert her influence over her Kentish husband Aethelberht.²⁹ Bede relates that Pope Boniface urged Aethelburh, their daughter, to proselytize in turn her husband Edwin who was reluctant to accept Christianity. Success would not only redeem her husband's soul but legitimize the marital bond:

*Unde paternis officiis vestrae gloriosae Christianitati nostram commonitionem non distulimus conferendam, adhortantes quatinus, divinae inspirationis imbuta subsidiis, inopportune et oportune agendum non differas, ut et ipse Salvatoris nostri Domini Jesu christi cooperante potentia Christianorum numero copuletur, ut perinde intemerato societatis foedere iura teneas maritalis consortii.*³⁰

[Therefore we do not hesitate, in accordance with our fatherly duty, to send a warning to your Christian Highness; we urge you that, being imbued with the Holy Spirit, you should not

hesitate, in season and out of season, to labor so that, through the power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, he may be added to the number of Christians, so that you may thereby enjoy the rights of marriage in undefiled union.]

Of course, unlike Edwin, John already has a strong faith and in fact earlier in Margery's life had urged *her* to be less worldly. Following her conversion, however, she labors to improve her husband's Christian observance by embracing physical purity in accordance with God's will. One summer night, eight weeks after John has agreed to his wife's request, he asks her: "Margery, yf her come a man wyth a swerd & wold smyte of myn hed les than I schulde comown kendly with yow as I have do be-for, seyth me trewth—whethyr wold ye suffyr myn hed to be smet of er ellys suffyr me to medel wyth yow a-yen as I dede sumtyme?" Reluctantly his wife breaks the bad news: "For-sothe I had leuar se yow be slayn than we schuld turne a-gen to owyr vncleynesse." With hurt feelings and bruised ego perhaps, John retorts, "Ye arn no good wyfe."³¹ Arguably, however, Margery *is* being a good wife in a spiritual sense. While he obviously fails to appreciate her efforts, Margery's desire to refrain from marital sex would certainly benefit his soul, according to Christian doctrine. Moderate sexual activity was permissible for the means of procreation, and, according to some theologians, as an expression of the marital bond and affection. As she tells us, she has more than moderately expressed her love for John, and with fourteen children, Margery has clearly done her procreational duty. As such, her plan to eschew sex follows a recommended route.

As has been said, according to many of the Church Fathers—Jerome, Isidore, Augustine, and Gregory among them—sex was for procreational purposes only. In order to safeguard against excessive lust in the process, husbands and wives were advised to refrain from sex periodically. Some of the more common recommendations were that out of respect for the sacrament of marriage, couples should refrain from sex for three days after their wedding; in addition, sex was to be avoided during pregnancy, during times of penance and throughout Lent, on Sundays and on major liturgical feast days.³² A second type of continent marriage—one appropriate to Margery and John's situation—was that in which older couples past the age of procreation stopped having sex. Augustine in *De Bono Conjugali* suggested a two-stage marriage friendship, only one stage of which produced children and so included sexual intercourse.³³ For example, while Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, and his wife Therasia had not been abstinent through-

out their marriage, Augustine saw in their renunciation of sex the opportunity "to enjoy a single-minded intimacy."³⁴

However, even in the face of general agreement that Margery's request of John is spiritually beneficial, she is not free to make such a decision unilaterally. Key to Gratian's philosophy of a sacramental marriage was the concept of marital debt. This notion was based on St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7.3-4:

Uxori vir debitum reddat, similiter autem et uxor viro. Mulier sui corporis potestatem non habet, sed vir; similiter autem et vir sui corporis potestatem non habet, sed mulier.

[Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to her husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband. And in like manner the husband also hath not power of his own body, but the wife.]

Combined with the belief that sexual consummation was necessary to a legitimate marriage and transformed it into an indissoluble sacrament, marital sex became both a right and an obligation.³⁵ As such, denying a spouse sex, even for the purpose of taking religious vows, was unlawful.³⁶ Paradoxically, then, even in her inability to improve John's soul through sexual abstinence, Margery continues to fulfill her Christian vocation as she fulfills his desire for a sexual relationship.

That Margery is aware of and bound by the concept of marital debt is clear in her word choice in the conversations concerning this matter. When she first desires to give up sex, the *Book* recounts that the "debt of matrimony" is abominable to her yet she obeys John's will and continues to render the debt. Later, when John finally agrees to a sexless marriage, he does so in a manner that exchanges debt for debt: "Margery, grawnt me my desyr, & I schal grawnt yow yowr desyr."³⁷ Along with requesting that they sleep in the same bed and that his wife eat and drink with him on Fridays, John asks for a literal debt payment in return for forfeiting the metaphorical one: "ye schal pay my dettys er ye go to Iherusalem."³⁸

Despite her careful observance of such responsibilities, Margery nevertheless feels deficient in her faith. As Fienberg rightly points out, she is in a double-bind. While her argument ignores the sizable body of literature in praise of marriage, it nonetheless makes a valid point: "[Margery] cannot be a good wife, paying the sexual debts expected of a good wife, and a good Christian woman. According to the dominant

religious ideology, virginity, not virtuous marriage, was the route to religious validation. . . . It is impossible for her to fulfill her religious ambitions and to serve her husband's needs."³⁹ After all, everyone knew that the virgin garnered the highest reward, receiving one hundredfold where the widow received sixtyfold, and the spouse merely thirty.⁴⁰ In sorrow, Margery cries to the Lord: "A, Lord, maydenys dawnsyn now meryly in Heuyn. Xal not I don so? For be-cawse I am no mayden, lak of maydenhed is to me now gret sorwe."⁴¹ In reply Christ seems to confer honorary virgin status: "Dowtyr, I be-hote the the same grace that I be-hyte Seynt Katerine, Seynt Margarete, Seynt Barbara and Seynt Powle."⁴² Namely, she shall dance in Heaven with other holy maidens and virgins. And, Christ tells her, "I may clepyn the dere a-bowte & myn owyn derworthy derlyng. I xal sey to the, myn owyn blyssed spowse, 'Welcome to me wyth al maner of joye & glanes, her to dwellyn wyth me & neuer to departyn fro me wyth-owtyn end.'"⁴³ The words here group Margery with virginity's "greatest hits" and promise the female virgin's traditional reward—metaphorical marriage to Christ.

Nevertheless, Christ makes clear elsewhere that it is her right observance of her own vocation, marriage, and not her lost virginity, that matters. At another time, the Lord tells her that she is pregnant again. Margery—ashamed of this proof of sexual intercourse—answers, "Lord, I am not worthy to heryn the spekyn & thus comown wyth myn husbond."⁴⁴ But Christ feels just the opposite: "Therfor is it no synne to the, dowtyr, for it is to the rathar mede & meryte, & thow xalt haue neuyr the lesse grace, for I wyl that thow bryng me forth more frwte."⁴⁵ In fact, his words also show an awareness of Margery's double-bind: "Tha, dowtyr, trow thow rygth wel that I lofe wyfes also, and specyal tho wyfys wech woldyn levyn chast, gyf thei mygtyn haue her wyl."⁴⁶ Although the Lord doesn't go so far as to equate marriage with virginity, "Yet dowtyr," he says, "I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world" and once again confirms the legitimacy of her vocation despite her nonvirginal state.⁴⁷

Following John's fall down the stairs prior to his death, Margery prays to God to heal her husband, fearful that she will be blamed for the accident.⁴⁸ He grants her request, asking in return that she take John home and care for him. At first she refuses, citing the interference that nursing would have in her devotion to Christ: "Nay, good Lord, for I xal than not tendyn to the as I do now." Yet Christ's response highlights the value that lies in such wifely ministration: "Gys, dowtyr . . . thu xalt haue as meche mede for to kepyn hym & helpyn

hym in hys nede at hom as gyf thu wer in chirche to makyn thi prayers."⁴⁹ Despite Margery's frequent misgivings and insecurities, we have Christ's words that her marriage to John is a worthwhile endeavor and a Christian vocation in its own right. Just as Christ in the Bible assures his followers, "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." [*Quamdiu*] *fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimus, mihi fecistis*],⁵⁰ he assures Margery that her actions will not go unnoticed: "And thu hast seyde many tymys that thu woldist fawyn kepyn me. I prey the now kepe [John] for the love of me."⁵¹

As Christ's words show, Margery has placed undue weight on the importance of virginity in her service to God, believing that fulfillment of her Christian vocation relies on her ability to maintain a vow of sexual chastity. In fact, her necessary focus on her marriage inadvertently results in the fulfillment of a different vocation. In the final act of her marriage to John, Margery "seruyd hym & helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde adon Crist hym-self,"⁵² actions which ultimately reflect in general the worthiness of marriage and reinforce the social and religious roles of wives.

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Notes

- ¹ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS, o.s. 212 (London: Oxford UP) 112.
- ² Kempe 116.
- ³ Kempe 115.
- ⁴ Nona Fienberg, "Thematics of Value in The Book of Margery Kempe," *Modern Philology* 87 (1989): 137. In her article, however, Fienberg argues that Margery responds to her society in a manner which challenges the *status quo* and creates a new place for herself.
- ⁵ Kempe 6.
- ⁶ Nancy Partner, "Reading the Book of Margery Kempe," *Exemplaria* 3 (1991): 38-39.
- ⁷ J.P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus*. Series Latina. vol 171 (Paris, 1844-80) 959. Hereafter PL.
- ⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Church*, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983) s.v. "Peter Lombard." Hereafter ODCC.
- ⁹ ODCC, "Sacrament."
- ¹⁰ Kempe 11.
- ¹¹ Partner 40.
- ¹² Kempe 12.
- ¹³ Kempe 12.
- ¹⁴ Kempe 12.
- ¹⁵ Kempe 6.

¹⁶ “[Bonum] est homini mulierem non tangere; propter fornicationem autem unusquisque suam uxorem habeat, et unquaeque suum virum habeat. . . . Nolite fraudare invicem, nisi forte ex consensu ad tempus, ut vacetis orationi, et iterum revertimini in idipsum, ne tentet vos Satanas propter incontinentiam vestram. Hoc autem dico secundum indulgentiam, non secundum imperium. Volo enim omnes vos esse sicut meipsum; sed unusquisque proprium donum ex Deo, alius quidem sic, alius vero sic. Dico autem non nuptis, et viduis: Bonum est illis si sic permaneant, sicut et ego. Quod si non se continent, nubant; melius est enim nubere quam uri” [“It is good not to touch a woman. But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. . . . Defraud not one another, except, perhaps, by consent, for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and return together again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency. But I speak this by indulgence, not by commandment. For I would that all men were even as myself: but everyone hath his proper gift from God: one after this manner, and another after that. But I say to the unmarried, and to the widows: It is good for them if they so continue, even as I. But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt”] (1 Cor. 7.1-2, 5-9). This and all subsequent Biblical quotations are from the *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatem Versionem*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1975) and, in translation, *The Holy Bible*, Douai-Rheims Version (Baltimore: Murphy, 1930).

¹⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 383.

¹⁸ *Adversus Iovinianum* I.7, PL 23. 229. Translated by C.W. Marx in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 64.

¹⁹ Blamires 64.

²⁰ Letter 22, to Eustochium. PL 22. 403.

²¹ *De Bono Conjugali*, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. (CCSL) vol. 41 (Vienna, 1866) 190; PL 40. 375. Translated by Jean Truax, “Augustine of Hippo: Defender of Women’s Equality?” *Journal of Medieval History* 16 (1990): 289.

²² *Contra Julianum*, PL 44. 756. Translated by Matthew A. Schumacher, *St. Augustine Against Julian, Fathers of the Church* (New York, 1957) 198.

²³ Ambrosiaster's letter to Gregoria appears in H.J. Vogels, ed., CCSL vol. 82 (Turnholti, 1954) 2, 74, and is summarized in Brown 378.

²⁴ Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches 1100-1300* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997) 13.

²⁵ Cartlidge 15.

²⁶ Kempe 221-29.

²⁷ Kempe 32.

²⁸ Lynn Staley Johnson, "Margery Kempe: Social Critic," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992): 171.

²⁹ A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, ed., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869-71), 3, 17-18.

³⁰ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), ii.11; 172-75. With facing translation. Hereafter EH.

³¹ Kempe 23.

³² James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 91-92. Although several people offered such suggestions, in the fifth century St. Caesarius of Arles attempted to codify many of them.

³³ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 402.

³⁴ Letter 31. 6: 424, in Brown 403.

³⁵ Brundage 235-36.

³⁶ Gratian was not the first or only theologian to be concerned with this concept. Augustine, for example, believing that the unavoidable lust that accompanies sex is sinful, had argued that marital intercourse was blameless only when this lust was moderated by "procreative intent" or the act of rendering the marital debt. Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Marital Law," *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. Julia Bolton Holloway, Constance S. Wright, and Joan Bechtold (New York: Lang, 1990) 130.

³⁷ Kempe 24.

³⁸ Kempe 24.

³⁹ Fienberg 138.

⁴⁰ The yields appear in the parable of the sower, Mark 4.3-32, and are echoed in, for example, Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, I; Jerome, Epistles 22.15; 48.3; 66.2; 120.1, 9; Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, 45; and Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, 1.60.

⁴¹ Kempe 50.

⁴² Kempe 52.

⁴³ Kempe 53.

⁴⁴ Kempe 48.

⁴⁵ Kempe 48.

⁴⁶ Christ, like Margery, equates chastity with sexual abstinence. However, early and medieval Christian theology acknowledged three chaste states appropriate to one's status in life: unmarried virginity, temperate spousehood, and abstinent widowhood. Of course, because Margery apparently derives excessive pleasure from sexual intercourse, her behavior falls outside the definition of marital chastity, even though it does occur within the sacrament of marriage. See Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Buffalo: U

of Toronto P, 1993), especially chapters 6 and 7, for a more complete discussion.

⁴⁷ Kempe 49.

⁴⁸ This episode provides another example of the public's negative attitude to Margery's "unorthodox" marriage. At this point in their lives, Margery and John, to avoid scandal and a general distrust of their vows of abstinence, are no longer living together. Ironically, after they have found John and sewn his wounds, "than the pepil seyde, gyf he deyde, hys wyfe was worthy to ben hangyn for hys deth, for-as-meche as sche myght a kept hym & dede not" (Kempe 179).

⁴⁹ Kempe 180.

⁵⁰ Matt. 25.40.

⁵¹ Kempe 180.

⁵² Kempe 181.